

Safe medicine patch disposal

Some medicines come in patches you attach to your skin. Examples include:

- **NicoDerm CQ** (**nicotine**), used to quit smoking
- **Climara** (**estradiol**), used to treat symptoms of menopause
- **Duragesic** (**fentanyl**), medicine patches used to relieve serious, long-term pain.

Patches are designed to give a constant amount of medicine over a certain period of time, usually several days. New patches contain lots of medicine, but used patches can still contain medicine after you take them off. Both new and used patches can be dangerous for children or pets. Children may think patches are like stickers, tattoos, or Band-Aids.

In a tragic story, a 4-year-old child died after placing a **Duragesic** patch on his body. His mother had been using these patches for pain from Crohn's disease, a digestive tract disorder. After she found her son dead, she also found a torn wrapper in an overturned bedroom trashcan.

It was not clear whether the boy stuck a used patch on his body or opened a new one and applied it.

Children have also been exposed to danger from medicine patches that fell off a family member. In one case, the child sat on the fallen patch and it stuck to her upper thigh. One child removed a patch while his grandmother was sleeping and applied it to himself. In these cases, the patches were noticed right away and the children were not injured.

Most patch directions say to fold the sticky sides together and then throw them in the trash or flush them down the toilet. However, flushing could pollute the water supply or clog sewage systems. The mother of the boy who died tried flushing her used patches at first. She decided to put them in the trashcan after clogging her toilet and reading about harm to the environment from flushing medicines.

See **Check it out!** for safer ways to store and dispose of patch medicines.

Check it out!

Follow these suggestions for safe patch use to better protect children, pets, and the environment.

- ✓ **Store patches safely.** Keep new patches far away from the reach or discovery of children. A high locked cabinet would be best.
- ✓ **Avoid attention.** Do not let children see you apply patches or call them "stickers." This could attract children and encourage them to mimic your actions.
- ✓ **Dispose of patches safely.** Fold the sticky sides together and place them in a sturdy container, preferably with a child-resistant cap. Be sure the opening is big enough for a folded patch to go in but small enough that a child's hand cannot. A washed-out bottle with a child-resistant cap may work well. You could also ask your pharmacist for a large empty bottle or prescription vial with a child-resistant cap. Or look in the drugstore for "sharps containers" that diabetics use for their insulin needles. Some of these can even be mailed back to the container company for free when they are ready for disposal (visit www.bd.com/sharps/ for one example).
- ✓ **Discard frequently.** Whatever container you use to dispose of patches, remove it from your home frequently. The more used patches available to someone, the more seriously they can be harmed.

60 second safety tip

■ **Check your inhaler before use.** After using his **albuterol** inhaler, an asthmatic man began to cough uncontrollably. Instead of the medicine making it easier for him to breathe, he felt like something was stuck in his breathing passages. An x-ray at a clinic confirmed that there was a coin in his windpipe—a dime that had to be removed through a tube inserted down his throat. The man later told the doctor that he kept the inhaler in his pocket without the dust cap on, along with money and coins. This allowed a dime to become lodged in the opening of the inhaler and be inhaled along with the medicine. People who use inhalers should always keep the dust cap in place between uses. They should also check the mouthpiece before use. Even a little dust or lint can cause problems if pushed into the windpipe or lungs when using the inhaler.

► Brand name medicines appear in **green**; generic medicines appear in **red**.

Has your medicine been in the news?

Some medicines have been in the news lately, warning people about possible side effects and problems with long-term use. For instance, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now requires “black-box” warnings on nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Some of the more common NSAIDs include:

- **ibuprofen** (Advil, Motrin)
- **naproxen** (Aleve, Naprosyn)
- **ketorolac** (Toradol).

The FDA has received numerous reports about people who have experienced stomach or intestinal bleeding, heart attacks, or strokes when taking NSAIDs. So the new “black-box” warning includes information about these possible side effects. You may have also heard news stories about medicines being pulled “off the market” for safety. You may recognize names like **Vioxx** (rofecoxib) or **Celebrex** (celecoxib) from news stories. These are called COX-2 inhibitors. People may have a greater risk of heart attacks or strokes when taking these medicines. Both NSAIDs and COX-2 inhibitors are commonly prescribed to treat pain.

News stories about medicines you take may leave you feeling worried and confused. One way to clear things up is to talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about your concerns. This sounds easy. Unfortunately, most people are reluctant to do this. A research study showed that 7 out of 10 people who take pain medicine for arthritis and joint pain had never

spoken to a doctor or nurse about any potential side effects of taking these medicines!¹

If you are unsure about the questions to ask, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) can help. NCPPIE designates October as “Talk About Prescriptions” month. As part of this year’s initiative, they have posted the following questions you can use when talking with a healthcare provider about any medicine that has been in the news lately:

- What are the risks associated with taking this medicine?
- Do you think the benefits of taking this medicine outweigh the risks?
- Are there any alternative medicines to the one I am taking?
- Are there any alternatives to this medicine, such as making lifestyle changes? If yes, should I try these?
- What side effects should I look out for and when should I call you about them?
- In summary, would you review the best course of action for me?
- Can we set up an appointment in 1 to 3 months to see how I’m doing on the new drug?

To learn more about “Talk About Prescriptions” month, go online to: www.talkaboutrx.org/rxmonth2005.jsp.

Reference: 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Monitoring Progress in Arthritis Management—United States and 25 States, 2003. Available at: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/arthritis/index.htm.

NATURALLY SPEAKING



Kava is an herbal product that people claim reduces stress and calms you. Please be aware that **kava** has a risk of severe liver damage and should never be taken if you have liver problems. Even if you are healthy, there are some bad side effects that may occur if you take this product.

In a few cases, people who took **kava** experienced side effects sometimes associated with powerful psychiatric medicines. These included:

- Restlessness and shaking
- Involuntary movements of the mouth, lips, and tongue
- Painful twisting movements of the back or abdomen
- Sudden episodes of the eyes rolling back, mouth opening widely, tongue sticking out, and eye pain.

In some people, these symptoms appeared within hours of taking one dose. **Kava** may also increase the effects of medicines used to treat anxiety. One young woman became very weak and confused after taking **kava** along with **Xanax** (alprazolam), an anti-anxiety medicine.

Injury to the skin can also happen after sun exposure. Several people who had been taking **kava** extract for 2 to 3 weeks developed itching and red patches on their face, chest, and back. In these areas of their bodies, the oil glands in the skin had been destroyed.

Stop taking **kava** if you experience any of these symptoms, and tell your doctor right away. Always talk to your pharmacist or doctor before starting any new medicine or diet supplement. You can also go online to: <http://nccam.nih.gov/> for warnings and information about herbal products.

Contact Information



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